Valentine's Day: Ishmael

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Valentine's Day: Ishmael

by Bordementions

Summary

Ishy fishy

Notes

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Chapter 1

The day's mission was long over, and Mephistopheles had settled into its usual quiet hum as the sinners dispersed for the evening. Somewhere in the depths of the bus, the faint sounds of arguments and laughter still lingered, but here, near your room, all was calm. You'd just gotten comfortable when there was a knock at your door—firm but not trying to draw overt attention.

You opened it to find Ishmael standing there, a bouquet of flowers in her hands. The sight alone was almost enough to make you forget how exhausted you were. The flowers weren't extravagant, just a simple arrangement, slightly uneven like they'd been hastily put together—but that made it a little bit more endearing.

"I read somewhere that it's customary for Valentine's day," Ishmael said, her voice level but her eyes pointedly avoiding yours.

Your brows lifted as you took the bouquet from her hands, examining it with a small smile. "Customary, huh?"

She nodded, arms crossing over her chest. "Yes. It was listed as a traditional gesture." A pause. "Nothing too serious."

You tilted your head at her. Something about the way she was standing, the deliberate neutrality of her tone, the way she was avoiding your gaze—it was almost out of character for her. Ishmael never hesitated when speaking her mind, but right now…

Oh.

She was embarrassed.

Your grin widened just slightly. "Ishmael," you said slowly, testing the waters, "are you nervous?"

Her hazel eyes flickered to you, sharp and wary. "Why would I be?"

"Well, you're being awfully stiff about this." You held the bouquet up between the two of you. "I mean, flowers? That's pretty sentimental of you."

Ishmael stiffened further, looking like she was calculating how to best navigate this conversation without sinking herself deeper. "I told you—it's just customary."

“Right, right,” you said, nodding sagely. “It’s got nothing to do with you wanting to do something nice for me, huh?”

There was a beat of silence. Then, just as you thought she might double down on her defense, Ishmael let out a slow exhale, her shoulders relaxing. She rubbed the back of her neck, finally meeting your eyes with something closer to her usual self.

“You’re impossible.”

You laughed, stepping aside and motioning for her to come in. “C’mon, let’s put these in some water before they wither away. Don’t want your ‘customary gesture’ to go to waste, do we?”

She huffed, but there was the barest hint of a smile on her lips as she stepped inside.

Maybe she wasn’t great at this kind of thing, but the effort was there.

You busied yourself with finding a suitable container for the flowers, rummaging through your room while Ishmael stood awkwardly by the door. She had clearly not thought this far ahead. The gesture had been made, the flowers handed over—now what?

“You can sit down, you know,” you said, throwing her an amused glance over your shoulder.

Ishmael hesitated for only a moment before stepping further inside and lowering herself onto the edge of a chair. She crossed her arms, one foot tapping idly against the floor as she watched you. “You’re really making a big deal out of this,” she muttered.

“Oh, absolutely,” you said, grinning as you finally found a cup that could pass for a vase. You filled it with water and placed the flowers in it carefully. “It’s not every day someone gives me flowers. Especially not you.”

Ishmael exhaled sharply, though it wasn’t quite a sigh—more like an attempt to mask her embarrassment. “Well, don’t get used to it.”

That only made you smile wider. “So, you are embarrassed.”

“I’m not embarrassed.”

“You totally are.”

Ishmael gave you a flat look. “If you’re just going to tease me all

night, I can leave."

"You could," you mused, turning back to admire the flowers, "but you haven't yet."

For a moment, there was silence. Then, reluctantly, Ishmael let out a small chuckle, shaking her head. "You're ridiculous."

You turned to face her fully, leaning back against the table. "Maybe. But you're the one who brought me flowers, so who's really the ridiculous one here?"

She looked at you then, and for all her earlier stiffness, there was something undeniably fond in her gaze. "…Guess I don't really mind, though."

That made your chest warm in a way you hadn't expected. You smiled, softer this time, before reaching out to adjust one of the flowers in the makeshift vase. "They're really nice, by the way. I mean it."

Ishmael nodded, the tension finally leaving her posture entirely. "Good. Then I guess it was worth it."

The quiet comfort of your room lingered for a while, but eventually, Ishmael stood, brushing her hands over her coat as if shaking off the remnants of her hesitation.

"So," she said, glancing away briefly before meeting your eyes again. "Since I already went through the trouble of getting the flowers, I figured we could… go out for a bit?"

You tilted your head, lips curving into a teasing grin. "Are you asking me on a date, Ishmael?"

Her brows furrowed immediately. "Don't make it weird."

"Oh no, I wouldn't dream of it."

Ishmael rolled her eyes but didn't argue further. Instead, she turned toward the door, jerking her head for you to follow. "C'mon. Before I change my mind."

You didn't need to be told twice.

Mephistopheles' breakroom wasn't exactly the most romantic setting, but it was the best you could do considering your unconventional

living situation. The space was empty at this hour, the usual clatter of the other sinners nowhere to be found. The overhead lamps bathed the room in a warm, dim glow, and the distant hum of the bus's machinery was the only sound filling the air.

Ishmael had procured some food—nothing fancy, just whatever was available. She pushed a plate toward you before settling across the table, resting her chin in her palm as she watched you expectantly.

"You're staring," you pointed out, raising a brow as you took a bite.

"I'm making sure you actually eat," she countered. "You tend to get distracted."

"Oh? So you've been paying attention to my habits?"

Ishmael paused, then exhaled sharply. "I didn't want ot make it obvious."

"Yeah, but don't worry. I like that you notice things about me."

Her gaze flickered up at that, her face softening. "Yeah, well. Someone has to make sure you're not neglecting yourself."

Warmth bloomed in your chest at her words, at the way her concern was always wrapped in bluntness but never insincere. You leaned forward slightly, resting your arms on the table. "Ishmael, you know this is a date, right?"

She tensed, blinking at you. "Yeah. I know."

"Just making sure." You smiled. "I'm really happy we're doing this."

Ishmael studied you for a moment before something in her expression eased. "Me too."

The rest of the night passed in easy conversation, a rare moment of peace in the chaos of your lives. And as you sat there with Ishmael, listening to her talk about past voyages and ridiculous crew mishaps, you found yourself thinking that, for all the madness you endured, maybe things weren't so bad.

Not when you had moments like this.

Not when you had her.

After finishing your meal, Ishmael tapped her fingers against the table,

hesitating for a moment before she spoke.

“There’s a spot near the coast not far from here,” she said. “Quiet. Good view of the water. Thought we could go there.”

Your lips curled into a smile. “Sounds perfect.”

She nodded, standing and grabbing her coat. You followed her out of Mephistopheles, stepping into the cool night air. The City was always loud and restless, but as the two of you walked further away from the bus and toward the shore, the sound faded into the background, leaving only the rhythmic crash of the waves.

The ocean stretched endlessly before you, dark waters illuminated by the moon’s glow. A steady breeze rolled in, bringing with it the familiar scent of salt and brine. Ishmael inhaled deeply, her shoulders visibly relaxing as she took in the sight.

“You really love the sea, huh?” you mused, watching the way her gaze lingered.

“It’s… familiar,” she admitted, sitting down on the sand and patting the space beside her. “Even if I never step foot on a ship again, I don’t think I could ever feel at ease too far from the water.”

You sat beside her, letting the gentle lull of the waves fill the silence for a moment before Ishmael pulled something from her coat pocket—two thick lengths of rope.

“I figured I could teach you something useful,” she said, holding one out to you.

You took it, looking down at the coarse fibers before glancing back up at her. “Knots?”

She hummed in confirmation. “Knowing how to tie the right one can be the difference between staying afloat or sinking.” She paused, then smirked. “Figured that was an appropriate lesson, considering you’re stuck with this crew.”

You chuckled, shaking your head. “Alright, Captain Ishmael. Show me how it’s done.”

She rolled her eyes at the title but didn’t protest. Instead, she held up her own rope, fingers moving with ease as she demonstrated the first knot. “This one’s a bowline. Keeps a loop from tightening under

strain."

You mimicked her movements, furrowing your brow as you tried to follow along. Ishmael watched for a moment before scooting closer, reaching over to adjust your grip. Her hands were warm despite the night's chill, rough fingertips brushing against yours as she guided them through the motions.

"Like this," she murmured, voice quieter now that the space between you had lessened.

You swallowed, focusing less on the knot and more on how close she was. When she finally pulled back, you held up your finished work with a triumphant grin.

"Not bad," she admitted, inspecting it with an approving nod.

"High praise coming from you."

She scoffed, but there was no real bite to it. Instead, she leaned back on her hands, gazing out at the waves once more. "You know, you're not half-bad company," she said after a beat.

You turned to her, grinning. "Careful, Ishmael. That almost sounded affectionate."

She shot you a flat look. "Don't push it."

You laughed, and after a moment, she did too.

The two of you sat there, the ocean stretching endlessly before you, the cool breeze carrying the scent of salt and the distant echoes of the city. Continuing and failing to tie various kinds of knots that she was trying to teach you.

Ishmael reached for another length of rope, rolling it between her fingers as she smirked. "Alright, let's try something a little more complicated."

You raised an eyebrow. "Oh? You think I've mastered the basics already?"

"No," she said bluntly. "But I want to see how much worse it can get."

You let out an exaggerated gasp. "Such little faith in me."

"Call it reasonable skepticism," she countered, handing you the rope.

“Now, this one’s a clove hitch. Good for securing things quickly, but it can slip if it’s not done right.”

She demonstrated with the ease of someone who had done it hundreds of times, looping the rope around her wrist and pulling it tight before undoing it in one swift motion. You attempted to copy her movements, but the knot you ended up with looked more like a tangled mess than anything functional.

Ishmael stared at it for a long moment, then exhaled through her nose. “I take it back. You wouldn’t just be a terrible sailor—you’d be a danger to the crew.”

You barked out a laugh. “That bad, huh?”

She gestured to the knot. “If we were on a ship and you secured the rigging like that, we’d lose the mast in an instant.”

“Oh, come on. I’m sure it’s not that—” You gave the rope an experimental tug, and the entire knot unraveled instantly.

Ishmael didn’t even try to hold back her laugh this time. Her hand barely muffled the sound, genuine and unguarded. You could feel the heat creeping up your neck, but the warmth in her expression made the mild embarrassment worth it.

“Well,” you said, tossing the rope aside in mock defeat, “guess I’ll just have to leave all the sailing to you.”

“That would be for the best,” she agreed, smirking. “Wouldn’t want to have to fish you out of the water every time you botched a tie.”

You nudged her shoulder with your own. “You’d save me, though, right?”

She clicked her tongue, pretending to think about it. “That depends. Would you have learned your lesson by then?”

“Absolutely not.”

She sighed, shaking her head with an exaggerated look of disappointment. “Then I suppose I’d have no choice.”

You grinned. “See? You do care.”

“Don’t make me regret it.” But there was no real annoyance in her voice—just the faintest trace of amusement.

You spent the next hour attempting (and mostly failing) to tie proper knots, each one met with another unimpressed remark from Ishmael. But she never once stopped guiding your hands, never truly gave up on you. And by the time the night had deepened and the wind had turned colder, you had almost managed to tie something passable. Almost.

Ishmael stretched her arms behind her head, glancing at you with that same familiar smirk. “Not the worst student I’ve had,” she admitted. “Still wouldn’t trust you with my life, though.”

“Give it time,” you teased. “I’ll win you over eventually.”

She huffed, shaking her head. “You’re insufferable.”

She rolled her eyes, but the small, fond smile she tried to hide told you everything you needed to know.

Ishmael leaned back on her palms, gazing out at the dark waves rolling gently against the dock. The sea breeze tugged at her hair, sending loose strands drifting across her face, but she made no move to brush them away. The moonlight carved soft edges into her face, casting her in a way you weren’t sure you’d ever seen before—calm, almost vulnerable.

You let the quiet stretch between you for a moment before breaking it. “You know,” you mused, twirling a bit of rope between your fingers, “for all your complaints, you’ve been surprisingly patient with me.”

She scoffed. “I wouldn’t go that far.”

“No? Then why are you still here, teaching a lost cause like me?”

Ishmael glanced at you from the corner of her eye. “Maybe I just like seeing you struggle.”

You grinned. “That’s cruel.”

“It’s entertaining,” she corrected. Then, after a beat, her voice softened. “And besides… I don’t mind it. The company, I mean.”

You tilted your head, watching the way her fingers curled slightly against the wooden planks of the dock. “That almost sounded sweet.”

You chuckled, shifting slightly to face her. “But you do like me, don’t you?”

Ishmael turned toward you, hazel eyes flickering with something unreadable. “You’re awfully bold all of a sudden,” she murmured.

You shrugged, letting your knee brush against hers. “Just following your example.”

She exhaled through her nose, shaking her head. “You really don’t know when to quit.”

“Would you want me to?”

Something in the air shifted. The teasing lilt of your words left the space between you charged. Ishmael’s gaze lingered, her usual sharpness dulled by something warmer, something far more hesitant.

Then, before you could say anything else, she moved.

In a swift motion, Ishmael pushed you back onto the dock, swinging her leg over to straddle your waist. Her hands pressed firmly against your shoulders, pinning you down with just enough force to make your breath hitch. The dock creaked beneath you, the waves lapping against the wooden beams in a slow, steady rhythm.

She stared down at you, expression unreadable, the weight of her presence sending your heart hammering against your ribs. “You really don’t know what you’re asking for, do you?” she muttered, voice barely above a whisper.

You swallowed, your hands instinctively resting at her sides. “Maybe you should enlighten me.”

A flicker of something passed through her eyes—amusement, exasperation, maybe even something deeper. Then, with a small sigh, she leaned down.

Her lips met yours, warm and firm, yet hesitant in a way that made your chest ache. The sea breeze curled around you both, but all you could focus on was the way she melted against you, the way her grip on your shoulders tightened ever so slightly as if grounding herself.

When she finally pulled back, her breath was slightly uneven. She studied you for a long moment before shaking her head with a soft chuckle. “You really are insufferable.”

You grinned, hands squeezing her waist. “And yet you’re still here.”

Ishmael huffed, rolling her eyes before letting herself collapse against you, her weight warm and solid atop you. “Yeah,” she murmured, barely audible over the waves. “I am.”

You let the weight of Ishmael against you settle for a moment, feeling the steady rise and fall of her breath. It was comfortable—warmer than you expected, given how stiff she could be. But you weren’t one to let things stay too peaceful for too long.

Tilting your head slightly, you let a slow, mischievous grin creep across your lips. “You know,” you started, voice laced with teasing intent, “since you’re so good with knots, I have to wonder—what else can you do with them?”

Ishmael tensed immediately. A second passed, then another, before she pushed herself up just enough to glare down at you, brows furrowed in a mixture of irritation and disbelief. “You’re really asking for it,” she muttered.

You only grinned wider. “I’m just curious.”

Ishmael exhaled sharply through her nose, the muscles in her jaw tightening. Then, without warning, she grabbed the stray bit of rope you’d been fumbling with earlier.

Before you could even react, she looped it around your wrists, twisting and tugging with an expertise that sent a jolt of something dangerously close to excitement through you. In mere seconds, your hands were bound snugly together, resting on your stomach.

You blinked, flexing your fingers slightly against the restraint. “Huh. That was fast.”

Ishmael crossed her arms, glaring down at you with a smirk tugging at the corner of her lips. “Of course it was. I was a sailor.”

You hummed, wiggling your bound wrists experimentally. “So, what now? You planning to leave me like this?”

She clicked her tongue, leaning in just enough that her breath ghosted over your cheek. “Maybe. Depends on whether you keep running your mouth.”

You looked up at her, another teasing grin etching itself onto your face.

"Aye aye, Captain."

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